

# Food Insecurity and Safer Sex Efficacy among NWT Adolescents



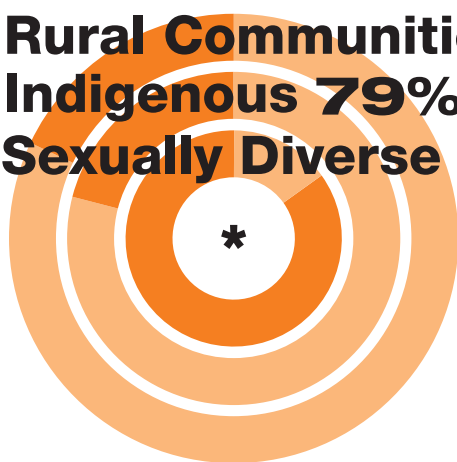
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## What we know from other research:

Arctic regions such as the Northwest Territories (NWT), and especially its Indigenous peoples, are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity <sup>[1]</sup> as well as sexual health disparities including sexually transmitted infections. <sup>[2]</sup>

## Demographics:

**Rural Communities 82%**  
**Indigenous 79%**  
**Sexually Diverse 15%**



Even in contexts of social adversity, NWT individuals and communities can and do exhibit strengths and adaptive coping:



Both **family and community** factors contribute to resilience and wellbeing. <sup>[9]</sup>



**Resilience** plays a role in the link between depression, condom use self-efficacy, and condom use among adolescents. <sup>[5]</sup>

## Key Terms

**Food insecurity:** Not having consistent access to enough food.

**Safer Sex Efficacy (SSE):** Feeling confident about making safe sexual choices.

**Social Determinants of Health:** Social and economic factors that influence people's health such as race, gender, and income.

**Resilience:** The ability to thrive or bounce back in a context of stress and adversity.

**Gender:** The socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.

**Most (79%) participants were Indigenous and 82% lived in communities outside of Yellowknife. Most (85%) identified as heterosexual.**

## Food insecurity is linked to:



Higher **STI risk** indicators. <sup>[3]</sup>



Increased **risks for depression** symptoms. <sup>[4]</sup>



**Maladaptive coping strategies** such as reduced uptake of safer sex practices. <sup>[5]</sup>



Lack of control in sexual relationships <sup>[6]</sup> and **intimate partner violence** <sup>[7]</sup>, both of which can result in reduced agency to negotiate safer sex.



**Chronic stress**, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness and self-blame. <sup>[8]</sup>

## Our Research Questions:

- How does food insecurity affect SSE for NWT adolescents?
- What is the role of resilience and depression?
- How can we build sexual health programs tailored to the needs of NWT adolescents?

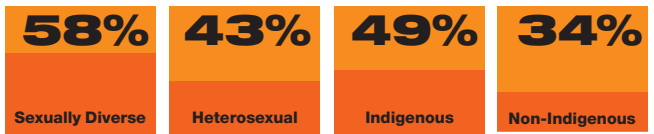
## How We Conducted This Research:

- FOXY (Fostering Open eXpression among Youth), an Indigenous sexual health organization, collaborated with schools and local organizations in 17 NWT communities.
- 410 students aged 13-18 attended a workshop and completed a survey exploring different factors associated with food insecurity such as resilience, depression, and relationships.

# What We Found about Food Insecurity:

Nearly half (45%) of the participants surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity.

# 45%



Participants who identified as women or non-binary were 2.5 times more likely to be food insecure compared to men.



# 2.5x



## We observed the following trends among those who reported being food insecure:



## Food insecurity affected SSE through interconnected factors:

- Food insecurity influenced confidence in using condoms through factors like resilience and feelings of depression.
- Food insecurity also affected situational SSE (knowing how to make safe choices under pressure from a partner) through resilience.

## Discussion

- Our work highlights the importance of food security as a social determinant of health among adolescents because of the way it limits their resilience and coping resources.
- Simply focusing on individual behaviors won't be enough to solve the broader problem of poverty among Northern youth. NWT adolescents need structural interventions to address the urgent issue of food insecurity, alongside resilience-focused strategies to address the intersection of sexual and mental health.
- Adolescent girls and young women are at disproportionate risk for food insecurity and need tailored poverty reduction and sexual health programs addressing root causes.

## Recommendations

Targeted interventions to directly address food insecurity can improve both mental and sexual health.

- Increasing household income and addressing related issues (housing, food prices, and transportation costs) can also help to tackle food insecurity.<sup>[10]</sup>
- Increasing Indigenous peoples' access to traditional and locally-sourced foods highlight important nutritional, cultural, spiritual, and economic values.<sup>[11]</sup>

Centering gender equity in food security action and sexual health programs can advance sexual wellbeing.

- NWT youth need structural and community-level interventions that address food insecurity — and its gendered impacts — alongside resilience strategies to advance sexual health.
- We must implement participatory, sex positive youth programming that incorporates safer sex efficacy concepts<sup>[12]</sup> such as FOXY's programs.

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